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The Path to One's Desire is Never Overgrown

Africa is a continent cradling many diverse countries. One of those countries is Uganda, a vast land rich with industrious people and valuable resources. Uganda has amazingly fertile soil, which makes Uganda an ideal land to nourish, and feed the world. Because of Uganda's premium soil, it is the second largest producer when it comes to bananas. Ugandans also use their numerous resources to produce other major crops such as millet, legumes, and sweet potatoes. Along with its fertile land, Uganda is home to many environmentally astonishing settings, such as the beautiful mountains that provide homes to endangered gorillas and chimpanzees. According to Richard Wrangham, founder of the Kibale Chimpanzee Research Station, about 5,000 chimpanzees still reside in Ugandan forests, making it a premiere ecological spot in the world. Uganda also has many lakes for bountiful fishing areas, and diverse flora and fauna, which also beckon to tourists. The country's rainfall is heavy, with the major wet season from February to May, and a minor season in October and November, which assist in growing deliciously lush crops.

Although Uganda is rich environmentally, large numbers of people are relocating from rural to urban areas in search of jobs, and because of the better access to health care and education. Though the benefits from living in urban areas are seemingly positive, the future negative is that there will be a loss of crop space with the implementation of city planning; the loss of crop space will adversely impact agricultural jobs, the food supply, and the people. According to the manager of The World Bank, Ms. Kundhavi Kadiresan, Uganda's population will be 68 million people by the year 2035. She also says that 30 % of the people will be living in urban areas. This will negatively impact Uganda's economy. Regardless of the population's location, Ugandans always try to keep their family first. While living in urban areas may have certain benefits now, in the years to come, the benefits might be cancelled out due to the rapid growth of population, and the loss of space. These effects can be reversed if people choose to live in rural communities, instead.

The Uganda environment is being destroyed because of urban living. There will eventually be traffic congestion, which will lead to higher rates of automotive pollution. As the urban population continues to grow, the land that is currently being used for agricultural farming will be used for homes and industries, which will intensify the loss of agricultural jobs. Also, the land that is not being used for new homes and industrial buildings will be damaged because of poor waste disposal. If these things happen, family health will decline, because currently, according to the CIA world fact book, 82% of Uganda's populations work in Agriculture. If people keep choosing to live in urban areas, the rural farmers will not get the adequate attention they need, because large scale farms and big industries will take over their chance to sell their goods in markets. People will buy from urban stores instead of utilizing the small markets that sell fresh produce. It will also make living in rural areas harder, because they will not have a steady income from the goods they produce.

With many people moving from rural areas to urban areas, less attention might be given to rural jobs, and to education. Because of this, most rural living areas could have limited formal education, which will ultimately decrease literacy rates. Also, with limited health care for rural areas, the spread of HIV and AIDS, and other diseases, could be increased. With limited formal education in rural villages, the population could continue to grow, because people might not understand the importance of family size.

Families in an average rural homestead are generally led by the father of the family; due to disease and other factors, the head of the family might be the widow, or, in some cases, it can be the oldest child.

There tends to be at least three generations living in one homestead. They all live together in a fenced enclosure. It is the duty of the head of the household to provide continuous production of food for the entire family. The women tend to do all of the housework and take care of the needs of the people that live within the homestead. Women also do the cooking, and care for their children and their sick elders. Girls work alongside their mothers to learn everything from cooking, cleaning, pottery crafting, caring for younger siblings, and other things related to managing the household. Women and children are also expected to gather the wood for fires and cooking, which tends to take lots of time from the day. The boys work alongside their fathers where they learn hunting, trading, and agricultural skills; this is when they learn how to provide for the family they may have someday.

With families being such an important aspect of Ugandan culture, it makes sense to approach a shift in thinking, regarding moving from rural villages to urban cities, through the youth, who are the future of Uganda, and who need to be positively impacted. To help with this impact, I propose first that we give more money to the international agencies, Bóthar, and Heifer International. The concept behind Bóthar and Heifer International is to assist families in villages by providing them farm animals to improve crop production, which will be able to increase the farmer's crop size and lessen the amount of time it takes to farm. This will also assist in establishing a continual income for their families. These agencies help them by first training selected village members about caring for the animals, and about environmentally friendly farming. Another premise of the organizations is to educate the community about preventative measures for disease, such as HIV and AIDS. The people that they train then go back to their villages and teach their families and village members what they have learned. The educated people then teach their children, and it's an endless tree of knowledge. Bóthar and Heifer International have already teamed up to help Uganda with the impact of AIDS on their communities. Their efforts from the past have positively affected Uganda's families.

One aspect of Bóthar and Heifer International's program helps people to obtain food, as well as income, through farming. The selected families are gifted with farm animals, such as a heifer, a flock of chicken, a sheep, a goat, a llama, or even honey bees, with which to work. All of the gifts help contribute to the well-being of the village. Through providing the villages with different farm animals, families will learn efficient farming, and will practice the important virtue of sharing. The different villages can share or barter their animals for a variety of goods. Doing this will promote a healthy way of receiving needed supplies from other villages and positive interactions between communities. Also, if the animals were to be used as a reward system for families with fewer children, perhaps the number of children per family might be reconsidered. This practice could help the future population size in Uganda.

Bóthar and Heifer International also positively impact rural communities through the gifting of bicycles. I propose each village should be gifted at least two bicycles. These bicycles could be recycled, or they could be provided from lost or stolen bikes that have been recovered and unclaimed; international programs could be put in place for this. Owning bicycles will help families reduce time when going to different markets, or when experiencing daily travel. This could also create jobs within the rural villages, because there will need to be a bicycle repair shop. Someone within the village could be trained on how to fix and operate the bikes. They could then begin their own repair business, passing the knowledge on to others, or establishing a family-operated business that could be passed down through generations.

Another idea is to give villages "SAFE" -- Safe Access to Firewood and Alternative Energy -- stoves; these are also called "energy stoves." These stoves are mud stoves that use less wood than conventional stoves, and are able to retain more heat for longer than an original wood stove. This enables women to cook their meals fully, and to cook them quicker. Currently, women and girls are taking at least a day at a time to collect wood, which can be very dangerous, because sometimes there are violent people and animals in the forests that assault the women and their children. Josette Sheeran, the Executive Director of WFP claims, "Women and girls should not have to risk their lives and dignity, and precious trees

should not be lost, in the simple act of trying to cook food for their families.” Therefore, women and children will be safer, and they will spend less time collecting wood, and more time cooking, and caring for their families by utilizing the gift of SAFE stoves. Another benefit to having these stoves will be that fewer trees are harvested, which will help sustain Uganda’s flora and fauna.

Along with the above listed ideas, another proposal is that each village gets assigned to a “district,” or is named as an area. For example, there could be 4 villages to one district. Then, each district would have a specific market place where rural village members would be designated to sell their goods. The market would be conveniently located so that all of the 4 villages would be able to safely and easily access them. This will enable each village to know where to buy and sell their goods, without overwhelming their individual markets. Once the districts and markets are assigned, they should be named. Then a map can be made so that tourists know which markets are for each part of Uganda. This way, if tourists want goods from, let's say, “East Uganda District,” they can look at the map, and know where to go, enhancing tourism activities and income for villagers.

The idea of “pay it forward” is where one group of people undergo training, and then they go and educate at least three more people, who then pass the knowledge along to at least three more people, and so on, exponentially. This is what should be done in Uganda’s villages. If this method were used to educate people about the benefits of contraceptives, and the prevention of HIV and AIDS, the number of new people infected with those diseases could rapidly decline. Currently, strong educational programs are in place that have proven to effectively impact the decline of the spread of diseases; these programs should be continued. A similar approach to educating people should be used for different farming techniques in order to make the most efficient use of land and animals, enhancing rural living.

To promote long-lasting effects, the youth of Uganda have to be a part of positive progress, which can result through being formally educated. For basic education, schools should eventually be built in each district. If there is a school in every district, the children will not have to travel very far to seek a formal education. They will be safer, and healthier, by not having to travel far each day. While the schools are being built, there should be designated people to go and teach in every village. Children age five and up should be taught. The groups could be as follows: first to third grade, fourth to sixth grade, seven to tenth grade, and eleventh and twelfth grade. The teachers should immediately be placed into the villages throughout Uganda to ensure that the children within begin their education as soon as possible. Formal education will allow for a more global competence, enhancing the future of the population.

In concluding my proposals, I also feel that progressive health care should be made available for each district, too. There should be a small hospital built in each district. An emphasis should be placed on educating village members in basic health care, and, also, there should be a request for hospital workers to reside in the villages in which they work. In the past, most women in rural villages delivered their children with no formally trained medical help. The hospital and staff can help prevent children born with illnesses by providing prenatal care. Also, having medically educated people in each village, there will be immediate help for delivering babies, and accessible help if anyone is sick or injured.

As can be seen, Uganda has immense potential. With industrious people, rich soil, magnificent mountains, numerous lakes, and an ideal climate for agricultural production, Uganda will, with some help, be able to grow economically, and agriculturally, as a country. If the current population can be maintained, as opposed to continuing to grow, and if Ugandan youth are taught about the benefits and importance of living rurally, and about the excellent effects that occur from taking care of their environment, then the land that is currently useable for agricultural deeds will be able to replenish, and succeed. This forecasted success could help Ugandans achieve a food secure status.

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